Genetically manipulated BT. Cotton

2143. SHRI MANOJ BHATTACHARYA: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the GM Crop Technology is safe for our environment; and

(b) if so, the reasons for which the Ministry of Environment has decided to postpone commercial clearance of GM crop-transgenic BT. cotton?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) Transgenic crops and other genetically modified organisms hold promise for the benefit of mankind through higher production of food material and newer medicines. However, concerns have been raised about the potential risks which may arise from the release of these transgenic organisms. These risks include spread of introduced traits to non-target species leading to genetic contamination, development of pest and herbicide resistance, contamination of food chains, displacement of traditional animal breeds and plant varieties thereby causing genetic erosion.

(b) The Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) set up under Rule 4 of the Rules for the Manufacture, Use, Import, Export and Storage of Hazardous Micro-organisms/Genetically Engineered Organisms or Cells 1989, considered the proposal for release of transgenic BT cotton submitted by Maharashtra Hybrid Seeds Company (MAHYCO), at its meeting held on 19.6.2001. The GEAC observed that the data generated on large scale field trials on BT. cotton undertaken by MAHYCO could not reflect the true values because of late sowing. It was decided that the trials be repeated on a larger scale under the direct supervision of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research under their Advanced Varietal Trials of the All India Coordinated Cotton Improvement Project. In addition, GEAC has accorded approval to MAHYCO for conducting field trials on farmers' fields in an area of about 100 hectares.